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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of cheating exists at every level of education, yet empirical research and theorizing about cheating behavior are scanty and inconclusive. This study used a questionnaire format to procure information relative to cheating at a small southwestern university. Age, sex, class standing, religion, and college were chosen as variables to be examined. Previous cheating behavior was also explored. Subjects were college students enrolled in the College of Business (N=33), the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (N=100), the College of Education and Technology (N=103), and the College of Fine Arts (N=131). The responses to the survey appear consistent throughout. Cheating appeared to occur in high school but to diminish at the college level. The results suggest that, while very few students deliberately plan ahead to cheat, they will take advantage of a situation if given the opportunity. Future research may want to more specifically address the issue of anxiety in cheating behavior. (The questionnaire is included with responses for students in each of the four colleges). (NB)

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The Psychology of Cheating Behavior

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Running head: CHEATING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The phenomenon of cheating exists at every level of education. Empirical research and theorizing however is scanty and inconclusive. This paper addresses the problem of cheating at the college level and offers some insights into this problem.

All teachers, professors, principals and instructors are aware that pupils "cheat." This cheating may involve glancing at another's paper "crib sheets" and other more intricate methodologies. When caught, students may profess innocence or deny their guilt. The rationale behind cheating may or may not be known even by the cheater.

The research on cheating is limited and anachronistic. Schab (1969) looked at cheating and sex differences. David (1963) examined cheating behavior in the ghetto school. Ellenburg (1973) explored the differences between high and low achievers relative to cheating. Heatherington and Feldman (1964) examined cheating relative to subject and situational variables. Johnson and Klores (1968) found attitudes toward cheating related to classroom dissatisfaction and peer norms. Age, class standing and commitment were examined by Kanfer and Duerfeldt (1968).

Vitro and Schoer (1972) examined test importance and risk of detection relative to cheating. Personality correlates were examined by White, Zielonka, and Gaier (1967) in terms of college women.

Bushway and Nash (1977) comprehensively reviewed school cheating behavior and offered a theoretical perspective relative to situational variables, personality characteristics and rationale for cheating.

However, there has been little empirical data since that time there may have been a decrease in cheating behavior or simply a lack of interest in this domain. The present study evolved from a meeting wherein several deans complained about an increase in notes on student's arms, periodic trips to the lavatory and extensive "index card crib notes" found in pocket books and under test sheets.

The present study utilized a questionnaire format to procure information relative to cheating at a small southwestern university. Age, sex, class standing, religion and college were chosen as variables to be examined. Previous cheating behavior was also explored. The four colleges on campus studied were the College of Business (n = 33), College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (n = 100), College of Education and Technology (n = 103) and the College of Fine Arts (n = 131). We had hoped to have approximately equal numbers of subjects from each college. However, when the Dean of the College of Business learned about the nature of the study, it was immediately terminated. This is of course of some concern, both for academic freedom and investigative research as well as the integrity of the study and the results. Informal data led us to believe that there was more cheating in that particular college. The reader must however form their own conclusions based on the limited data available.

All of the following results will be presented in percent age format.

		COB	CLAS	CET	CFA
1.	Sex				
	a. Male	58	35	22	42
	b. Female	42	65	78	55
2.	Age				
	18-19	12	28	24	31
	20-21	15	22	31	34
	22-23	21	17	8	12
	24-25	15	7	8	7
	25 and older	33	26	29	14

3. Status

Freshman	6	20	19	24
Sophomore	30	22	14	35
Junior	15	23	29	21
Senior	42	28	24	15
Graduate	6	4	13	3

4. Enrolled in:

A. College of Education and Technology (n = 103)

B. College of Fine Arts (n = 131)

C. College of Business (n = 33)

D. College of Liberal Arts/Sciences (n = 100)

E. Nondeclared Major (n = 4)

5. Religion

Catholic	39	26	29	16
Baptist	15	25	26	27
Protestant	18	11	14	13
Methodist	6	9	8	11
Other	21	27	20	28

6. Did you cheat in high school on tests?

	COB	CLAS	CET	CFA
a. Yes	42	40	52	49
b. No	58	59	48	48

7. Have you cheated in college on tests?

a. Yes	36	24	27	38
b. No	61	76	72	58

8. Have you used "crib sheets" in college on small pieces of paper with information on them to cheat?

a. Yes	21	8	10	15
b. No	79	92	90	82

9. Have you used "crib sheets" in high school?

a. Yes	18	30	39	34
b. No	82	70	61	64

10. Have you written notes on your hands/arms/desk during college?

a. Yes	9	30	39	15
b. No	91	70	61	82

11. Have you written notes on your hands/arms/desk during high school?

a. Yes	27	30	37	35
b. No	70	68	63	62

12. Have you deliberately looked at or read another student's test sheet or paper during college?

a. Yes	21	22	22	40
b. No	79	78	78	57

13. Have you deliberately looked at or read another's students test sheet or paper during high school?

	COB	CLAS	CET	CFA
a. Yes	27	41	47	53
b. No	70	59	53	44

14. Have you passed answers to another person during a test or allowed another student to see your answers during college?

a. Yes	42	40	18	44
b. No	58	60	82	54

15. Have you passed answers to another person during a test or allowed another student to see your answers during high school?

a. Yes	39	57	62	60
b. No	58	43	38	37

16. Have you planned with another student how you would cheat prior to an exam during college?

a. Yes	15	6	9	15
b. No	85	93	91	82

17. Have you planned with another student how you would cheat prior to an exam during high school?

a. Yes	21	22	29	28
b. No	67	76	69	66

18. Have you cheated on _____ during college?

a. Multiple Choice	27	21	20	30
b. Essay Exams	3	12	8	7
c. Math Tests	3	2	4	4
d. Final Exams	0	0	1	2
e. All of the Above	9	5	3	9

19. Have you cheated on _____ during high school?

a. Multiple Choice	30	20	23	27
b. Essay Exams	3	8	3	5
c. Math Tests	3	3	9	5
d. Final Exams	0	1	0	1
e. All of the Above	9	18	14	20

20. Which is the one main reason why you have cheated during college?

a. Didn't have enough time to study	12	8	17	6
b. Course was too hard	0	8	2	6
c. Professor gave very hard tests	18	9	9	19
d. Cut class too often	0	1	0	0
e. Was lazy during semester	9	6	7	8

21. Which is the one main reason why you have cheated during high school?

a. Didn't have enough time to study	18	9	22	21
b. Course was too hard	3	5	5	7
c. Professor gave very hard tests	3	10	6	10
d. Cut class too often	3	2	1	2
e. Was lazy during semester	15	21	20	22

22. Have you ever "bought" a term paper and handed it in as your own during college?

a. Yes	0	2	1	5
b. No	100	94	97	89

23. Have you ever "bought" a term paper and handed it in as your own during high school?

a. Yes	3	2	1	5
b. No	94	95	98	89

24. Have you ever taken materials from books without quoting the author during college?

a. Yes	24	38	29	31
b. No	76	60	71	64

25. Have you ever taken materials from books without quoting the author during high school?

a. Yes	30	33	42	45
b. No	58	64	57	50

26. Have you used the exact same term paper for two different courses during college?

a. Yes	18	21	20	16
b. No	82	78	80	79

27. Have you used the exact same term paper for two different courses during high school?

a. Yes	3	10	13	13
b. No	88	88	86	82

28. Have you ever copied another person's homework assignment and passed it off as your own during high school?

a. Yes	52	60	55	55
b. No	42	38	45	41

29. Have you ever copied another person's homework assignment and passed it off as your own during college?

a. Yes	36	21	27	31
b. No	64	77	72	65

30. Have you ever had a "friend" or "girlfriend" write parts or an entire term paper for you during high school?

a. Yes	3	8	8	14
b. No	88	89	92	81

31. Have you ever had a "friend" or "girlfriend" write parts or an entire term paper for you during college?

a. Yes	9	7	7	15
b. No	88	89	93	80

32. Have you ever gone to the bathroom during a test to review notes on your "gyp" sheets?

a. Yes	0	6	1	5
b. No	100	91	99	89

33. Have you ever inadvertently glanced at another student's paper, gleaned an answer and used it?

a. Yes	39	41	54	59
b. No	61	55	41	34

The responses to this short survey appear to be consistent throughout. While cheating does occur in high school, it seems to diminish at the college level. Very few students take the time to deliberately plan ahead to cheat, but it does appear that if given the opportunity, that they will take advantage of a situation. One weakness of this questionnaire is that it did not probe deeply enough into the motivation of "on the spot" cheating. Perhaps when confronted with a difficult test students will utilize whatever means at their disposal to do well or at least to minimize anxiety. Question twenty specifically, did not address the motivation of "getting good grades" or the inverse, avoiding failure or a poor grade. Cheating may be motivated more by a desire to avoid a poor grade than by a desire to procure a good one. Tests may of course present material for which the student has not prepared, or prepared cursorily. Cheating may serve to allay anxiety. The short run, and future research may want to more specifically address the issue of anxiety in cheating behavior. Future research may also want to focus on choice of major, although many students often remain undeclared until their junior or often early senior year.

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